

Bill would require hospitals to offer rape victims emergency contraception

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WASHINGTON -- Three U.S. senators introduced a bill Wednesday that would require hospitals to offer rape victims information and access to emergency contraception.

The "CARE Act" _ Compassionate Assistance for Rape Emergencies Act _ also would ensure rape victims receive proper medical care to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. The bill was introduced by Sens. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., Jon Corzine, D-N.J., and Olympia Snowe, R-Maine.

Several lawmakers, medical groups and victim's advocates were outraged when the Justice Department did not include emergency contraception options in its guidelines for treating rape victims last year. Justice Department officials have said the matter would be reviewed but have made no guarantees on including such guidelines.

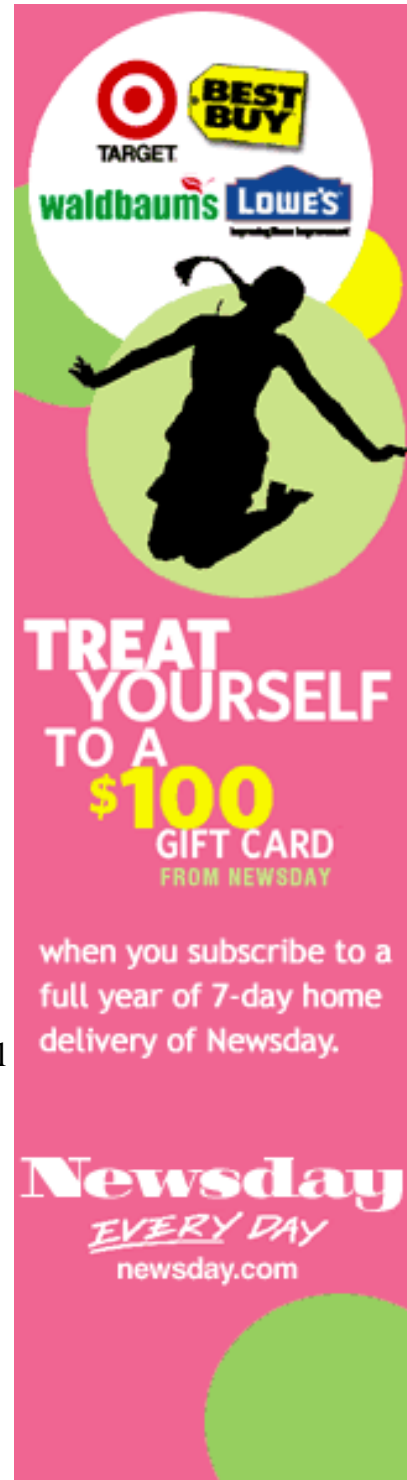
The availability of emergency contraceptives to rape victims varies nationwide, with some states allowing health care workers and facilities the right to refuse to perform any service they object to on moral or religious grounds.

"It is simply unacceptable that a rape victim's care depends on which hospital she is taken to," Corzine said. "This legislation will help sexual assault survivors across the country receive the medical care they need and deserve."

Clinton said the last thing rape victims need to worry about is the quality of medical care they will receive. Snowe said an estimated 300,000 women are the victims of sexual assault each year.

The bill goes to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

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